

Message Text

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EXDIS FROM UNA

FOL RPT KUWAIT 0610 ACTION SECSTATE INFO ABU DHABI AMMAN
CAIRO DAMASCUS DOHA JERUSALEM JIDDA MANAMA MUSCAT TEL AVIV
SANA 31 JAN 78 QUOTE

S E C R E T KUWAIT 0610

EXDIS

CAIRO AND JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ASST. SEC. ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: XF, PEBR
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN CONSIDERATION OF WITHDRAWAL FROM NEGOTIATIONS WITH
ISRAEL

1. SUMMARY: DURING JAN. 30 EVENING VISIT WITH
EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR OSAMA EL-BAZ ON VISIT IN KUWAIT, HE INFORMED
ME OF GROWING PRESSURE FROM MODERATE ARAB STATES ON
EGYPT TO PULL OUT OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND
CUT ITS POTENTIAL LOSSES IN WHAT LOOKS LIKE A "NO-WIN"

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SITUATION BECAUSE OF ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE. HE INDICATED
THAT THIS VIEW HAD ALSO SURFACED AMONG EGYPTIANS AND
THAT IT WAS BEING GIVEN CAREFUL CONSIDERATION. I SUGGESTED
THAT IT WAS TOO EARLY TO CONSIDER THIS OPTION, NOTING FIRM
COMMITMENT OF PRESIDENT CARTER TO SUPPORT ADMIRABLE INITIA-
TIVE OF PRESIDENT SADAT AND THAT TACTIC OF FIRM AND CALM
DETERMINATION IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAELIS COULD PRODUCE

PROGRESS IF BOTH SIDES PERSEVERED. END SUMMARY.

2. I MET WITH EGYPTIAN MFA UNDERSECRETARY OSAMA EL-BAZ AT HIS INVITATION ON EVENING JAN. 30 DURING HIS VISIT TO KUWAIT IN COMPANY OF VICE PRESIDENT MUBARAK WHOSE CHEF DE CABINET HE IS. MUBARAK AND PARTY, WHO ARRIVED EARLY THAT EVENING AFTER TWO DAYS OF VISITS TO SAUDI ARABIA, SANA, TEHRAN, AND ARAB GULF STATES, WILL MEET WITH AMIR AND FONMIN JANUARY 31. EL-BAZ DESCRIBED KUWAIT'S POSITION AS DELICATE AND SENSITIVE AND NOTED IMPORTANCE OF ITS ROLE AMONG ARAB STATES.

3. EL-BAZ REPORTED THAT ALL THOSE LEADERS VISITED, INCLUDING THE SHAH, INDICATED SUPPORT FOR GOAL OF PEACE SOUGHT BY SADAT, BUT EXPRESSED STRONG SKEPTICISM REGARDING PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS. EXCEPT FOR MUSCAT, ARAB STATES COUNSELED EGYPT NOT TO PURSUE NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAELIS FURTHER, SINCE IT WAS CLEAR THAT LATTER WERE NOT READY TO MAKE NECESSARY CONCESSIONS FOR PEACE. THIS ARAB GROUP CLAIMED U.S. WOULD NOT EXERT REQUIRED PRESSURE ON ISRAELIS BECAUSE OF ITS OWN STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS, BUT EL-BAZ ADMITTED THAT THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO EXPLAIN THIS ASSESSMENT SATISFACTORILY.

4. ALL ARAB INTERLOCUTORS PROMISED PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SADAT WITHDRAWAL FROM THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS TO BE
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PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO REFLECT CREDIT ON HIM FOR HIS MAJOR EFFORT TO ACHIEVE PEACE AND TO BRAND ISRAEL FOR ITS INTRANSIGENCE IN EYES OF WORLD OPINION. THEY ALSO INDICATED WILLINGNESS TO UNDERTAKE VIGOROUS EFFORTS TO HELP MEND RIFT BETWEEN SYRIA AND EGYPT SO THAT ARAB UNITY COULD BE RESTORED.

5. EL-BAZ NOTED THAT SIMILAR VIEWS WERE ALSO SURFACING IN EGYPT NOW. HE GAVE ME THE IMPRESSION THAT HE AND PRESUMABLY OTHERS IN SADAT'S ENTOURAGE WERE GIVING SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO THIS OPTION WITH THE AIM OF ENABLING SADAT TO CUT HIS LOSSES WITHOUT SERIOUS DAMAGE TO HIS POLITICAL POSITON. HE ADMITTED THAT ARAB PROPONENTS OF THIS CAUSE WERE CONCERNED AS MUCH ABOUT THEIR OWN SKINS IN THIS SITUATION OF UNCERTAINTY AND DISUNITY IN THE ARAB WORLD.

6. EL-BAZ WAS QUITE BITTER AND DISILLUSIONED ABOUT THE ISRAELIS WHO HE CLAIMED HAD ACTUALLY ESCALATED THEIR INITIAL NEGOTIATING DEMANDS RATHER THAN MODERATING THEM IN THE COURSE OF THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH EGYPT--ALL OF WHICH HE HAD PARTICIPATED IN. WHILE HE WAS IN NO

POSITION TO JUDGE THE ISRAELI POPULAR VIEW, HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE ISRAELI "ESTABLISHMENT" WAS, IN FACT, RACIST AND EXPANSIONIST AND WOULD TENACIOUSLY RESIST ANY EFFORT TO MAKE THEM GIVE UP THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

7. AFTER HEARING OSAMA OUT, I MADE FOLLOWING POINTS. I TOLD HIM THAT SADAT HAD TAKEN TREMENDOUS STEP FORWARD TO LAUNCH EGYPT (AND THE ARABS) INTO MOST DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WILL BE NECESSARY TO BRING ABOUT AN ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT. I RECALLED THE ENORMOUS DIFFICULTIES WHICH SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD ENCOUNTERED IN NEGOTIATING WITH THE ISRAELIS DURING THE SECOND SINAI DISENGAGEMENT SHUTTLE,
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AND SUGGESTED THAT INITIAL ISRAELI DEMANDS COULD BE OPENING GAMBIT IN LENGTHY NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WILL REQUIRE PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE AND PERSEVERANCE ON THE PART OF BOTH SIDES. (EL-BAZ REMEMBERED RIDING IN HELICOPTER IN ALEXANDRIA DURING ONE OF HENRY'S TIRADES AFTER AN ISRAELI NEGOTIATING SESSION WHICH WAS PROLONGED INTO THE EARLY MORNING HOURS.)

8. I SAID THAT I WAS AWARE OF THE ARAB POSITION, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A RESULT OF MY RECENT COVERSACTIONS WITH FONMIN SABAH AL-AHMAD. I NOTED THAT I HAD URGED SABAH AL-AHMAD TO INDICATE AT LEAT GENERAL SUPPORT FOR THE SADAT PEACE INITIATIVE. I AGREED THAT THE ARAB POSITON WAS PROMPTED BY THEIR CONCERN FOR ARAB UNITY. HOWEVER, I POINTED TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCABLE COMMITMENT TO PURSUE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WHICH WAS AMPLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE ARRANGEMENT OF HIS FORTHCOMING MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SADAT IN THE U.S. THEREFORE, I DID NOT FEEL THAT THIS WAS THE TIME FOR EGYPT TO FOLLOW THE OPTION PROPOSED BY ITS ARAB INTERLOCUTORS. IT WAS TOO SOON TO PULL OUT OF A NEGOTIATION WHICH REALLY HAD NOT ACTUALLY GOTTEN UNDER WAY. I HOPED EGYPT WOULD FOLLOW THROUGH AFTER THIS INITIAL BREAKTHROUGH WITH CALM AND FIRM DETERMINATION. IF NO PROGRESS COULD BE MADE AFTER A REAL TRIAL PERIOD, THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE UP THE OPTION OF WITHDRAWING AND PLACING EGYPT'S CASE BEFORE THE WORLD OPINION WOULD STILL BE AVAILABLE. I PERSONALLY FELT THAT THERE COULD BE REAL PROGRESS IF BOTH SIDES DEMONSTRATED THE WILL AND DETERMINATION TO CARRY ON THE NEGOTIATIONS. IF THERE WERE SUCH PROGRESS, IT MIGHT BE SUFFICIENT TO SWING AROUND THOSE MODERATE ARABS, WHO PRIVATELY FAVOR SADAT'S INITIATIVE, TO A POSITIVE PUBLIC STAND IN HIS SUPPORT.

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9. COMMENT: I HOPE THE LINE I TOOK WITH OSAMA EL-BAZ MEETS WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S APPROVAL AND CONFORMS TO WHAT ROY ATHERTON MAY HAVE SAID IN HIS AMMAN BRIFING. DESPITE EL-BAZ'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE VALIDITY OF MY ARGUMENTS ABOUT PERSEVERING, I SENSED THAT THERE IS GROWING SUPPORT ON THE EGYPTIAN SIDE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OPTION PROPOSED BY THE MODERATE ARABS. IT WOULD SERVE TO SHORE UP SADAT'S INTERNAL POSITION AND POSSIBLY RESTORE THE ARAB UNITY WHICH THE OIL-RICH ARAB STATES SO ARDENTLY SEEK TO PRESERVE. AS SABAH AL-AHMAD POINTED OUT TO ME RECENTLY, PATIENCE AND PERSEVERENCE IN NEGOTIATION ARE NOT PAR OF ARAB "LOGIC". CERTAINLY SADAT'S ADVISORS AND POSSIBLY SADAT HIMSELF NEED STRONG ENCOURAGEMENT ON THIS POINT IF WE CAN HOPE TO CONVERT THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGH INTO A PRACTICAL SUCCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.
MAESTRONE
UNQUOTE VANCE

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